



BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

August 1-August 15, 2008

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Record Number of Women in Supreme Court Training:

There are currently 84 female judges working in Afghanistan, out of a total 1,447. That number will increase by nearly a third within the next year when the latest group of female judicial candidates finishes their training with the Supreme Court. A total of 29 women—hailing from 13 provinces—are in Kabul for the USAID-supported 2008 Judicial Training Program, which will be completed in early spring 2009.

That number is up 59% from the 17 women who graduated from the 2007 course. The increase is "a good and positive step," says one of the female judicial candidates, Najeeba Husseini, speaking about her role as a future female judge.



Female judicial candidates attend classes at the Stage in Kabul. The number of women attending the stage has increased nearly 60 percent over last year.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



Study tables on the library's first floor.

PHOTO:
USAID/Afghanistan

Afghanistan's Largest Law Library Opened: On August 27th, the doors of the new law library at the Independent National Legal Training Center opened. For the first time, Afghanistan's legal community has access to the most comprehensive collection of legal literature in the country. With the new resources available, Afghanistan's lawyers, judges and government officials will have the information they need to support their country's growing justice sector.

Designed and developed by the USAID-funded Afghanistan Rule of Law Project, the new Law Library houses a full collection of Afghanistan's laws in Dari and Pashto languages, including 3,100 hardcopy volumes and a variety of newspapers and journals published by government institutions. The library also provides 11 computer terminals which allow users to search all of Afghanistan's laws electronically.



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ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Opium Cultivation Falls by 19%: USAID efforts to improve the availability of alternative livelihoods for farmers are paying off in the war against poppy production. On August 26, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) reported that the number of poppy-free provinces increased from 13 in 2007 to 18 provinces today and opium cultivation has fallen by 19% nationwide to its lowest level since 2006.

USAID alternative development programs supported a dramatic shift away from poppy production in the formerly poppy-rich northern and eastern provinces of Badakshan, Takhar, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, and Nuristan. USAID provided access to short-term employment as well as development focused on the longer-term needs of these agriculturally-rich and strategic provinces. Efforts included repairing roads, irrigation, canals and distributing high-quality seed and fertilizer to promote licit activities.

3rd Annual Kabul AgFair Draws Investment: On August 20-22, over 40,000 businessmen, women, entrepreneurs and people from the general public flocked to the 3rd annual Kabul AgFair. The USAID-supported event was designed to attract investment and promote Afghan products at home and abroad. More than 170 vendors showcased Afghanistan's fruits and nuts, vegetables, dairy products, carpets, and crafts. Delegates from businesses in China, Germany, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and the United States attended and forged deals, cutting inroads for Afghan products into hard-to-penetrate foreign markets. The fair featured six roundtable discussions and 55 business-to-business meetings, resulting in \$3.8 million in international deals and \$1.4 million in domestic deals, with an additional \$22 million deals prospected over the next year.

In addition to facilitating new business transactions and relationships, the AgFair showcased contemporary agriculture technology and techniques at the Knowledge Center and of the 41-hectare Badam Bagh Demonstration Farm. Local producers gained information on agricultural technologies and farming techniques geared toward increasing food production and improving irrigation technologies, greenhouses, grape trellises, and new crop varieties.



A vendor from the Pride of Eastern Region displays his vegetables at the Kabul AgFair.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



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ECONOMIC GROWTH

FINCA Loans Total US\$24.2 Million: On August 11, the USAID-funded Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) reported that it had disbursed a total of US\$24.2 million in loans to nearly 35,000 active borrowers. Started in September 2006, the program's Shariah-compliant loans have resulted in strong economic growth throughout the country. These loans enable Afghan entrepreneurs, farmers and businesses to expand their operations and empower them to rise out of poverty.



Afghan entrepreneurs open new shops with the help of FINCA loans.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

New Internship at Nangarhar University: To help address Afghanistan's need for strong management and business skills, USAID has initiated a new internship program for students at Nangarhar University. In this program, 70 students, including 30 females, attend a 3-month intensive business training course taught by Afghan CNN. Interns with professional backgrounds receive additional training in management, supervision, marketing, and accounting. After students graduate from the program, USAID helps place them in private firms or government institutions, giving them the opportunity to practice their new skills and help build strong organizations.